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ABSTRACT

To identify the benefits and outcomes of sabbatical leave practices of community colleges, a survey was undertaken of senior academic affairs administrators at community colleges across the United States. Questionnaires were mailed to 100 administrators requesting information on sabbatical practices at their college, their perceptions of the process, and desired outcomes. Study findings, based on 62 usable responses, included the following: (1) 33 of the administrators indicated that their colleges offered sabbatical programs, with 14 of these requiring submission of sabbatical reports upon completion of the experience; (2) at 19 colleges, the main purpose for offering sabbaticals was the improvement of teaching, while at 12 the emphasis was on improving research skills; (3) with respect to the benefits of sabbaticals, the administrators agreed most that faculty "felt a sense of rejuvenation and reward," "became up-to-date," and "felt as though their professional life had been substantially enriched"; (4) the lowest-rated benefit was that faculty "became caught up on their research and writing schedule"; (5) 42 of the respondents identified teaching improvement as the primary desired outcome of the experience; and (6) administrators at colleges with no sabbatical program were much less likely than those at colleges offering them to view research productivity as a benefit of sabbaticals. Data tables cover sabbatical practices and administrative perceptions; three are appended. (BCY)

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Sabbatical as a Form of Faculty Renewal in the Community College: Green Pastures or Fallow Fields?

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"Sabbatical as a Form of Faculty Renewal in the Community College: Green Pastures or Fallow Fields?"

Sabbatical leave programs can be vital resources in helping faculty renew their interest in both career and subject matter, and the result is often a substantial improvement in workplace morale and student achievement (Zahorski, 1994; Cooper, 1932). Recently, this argument has been challenged in public forums, such as state legislators (Lively, 1994), and resulting research has not definitively correlated sabbatical leaves with improved workplace performance (Miller & Kang, in press). In at least one public university post-sabbatical leave research productivity declined and faculty believed that they were not any better at providing institutional service after the experience (Miller & Kang, in press).

Claims and uses of sabbatical leaves may be fundamentally different in the context of community and junior colleges. Anderson and Atelsek (1982) noted that nearly two-thirds of all community colleges offer a form of sabbatical leave program, and that these leaves are generally geared toward improving content knowledge and enhancing teaching. With the more focused use of sabbaticals there is potentially a more clearly defined set of outcome or assessment measures. These measures, however, have not been identified in either the practitioner or scholarly literature base, and many community college administrators are quick to note that the assessment criteria is a sliding scale based on past individual performance, type of sabbatical, and institutional expectations (Zahorski, 1994). As higher education is more closely scrutinized concerning these faculty development

opportunities, it is imperative that institutions find a mechanism to articulate the criteria they use in justifying sabbaticals (Lively, 1994).

The current discussion is framed within the context of the sabbatical in community colleges, and specifically, what senior academic personnel view as the desired outcome measures for sabbatical leave programs. Drawing on a sample of deans of instruction and vice presidents for academic affairs, the question is put forth: What post-sabbatical assessment measures should be used to determine the effectiveness and value of a sabbatical leave? Public entities and institutions themselves will only be able to assure the continuation of sabbaticals when this important question is answered.

Sabbatical As a Tool of Faculty Development

Faculty play an important role in the quality of a higher education institution, particularly in community colleges where instructional quality is the primary and predominant measure of institutional effectiveness. This instruction must be built and framed on the productivity, qualifications, credentials, and knowledge base of faculty. Further, a major issue of faculty performance is morale: the sense of satisfaction faculty have toward their institution, colleagues, students, and academic disciplines. Faculty quality exerts a significant influence on the success as well as the image and prestige of an institution. Faculty are generally considered qualified and prepared when hired by an institution, but a number of studies have identified significantly lower levels of satisfaction and increased feelings of burnout on the part of faculty after consecutive years of service (Gaziel, 1995).

An additional factor to consider in faculty longevity and productivity are changes in student demographics (age, racial composition, etc.), educational settings (outreach centers, distance education, etc.), and instructional methods (such as technology and adaptations of instruction for various media), forcing faculty members to alter their usual teaching practices to keep pace with their changing environments. Therefore, the level of maintenance of qualified faculty has become crucial in order to enhance instructional quality, and to accomplish this, quality faculty development programs have been recognized as effective and efficient approaches. Stern (1989), in his study of staff members as lifelong learners, addressed the purpose of faculty development in community colleges, identifying a process which focuses on the improvement of instruction, professional skills, and organizational functioning, as well as the personal growth of faculty. Stern particularly described the sabbatical as an important and lucrative method of faculty development, with the potential for community college faculty to break from a normal work routine especially desirable.

The context of the sabbatical in the community or junior college is sporadically defined in few writings, most of which offer parenthetic notations of sabbaticals as a potential form of faculty development. The key to effective sabbatical use is that an individual faculty member gains something positive, learns, grows, or gains a better feeling about a job to the extent that there is a ripple-effect throughout the institution. Often, community colleges with smaller full-time faculty bases are well-suited to sustain a greater institutional impact. Also, as many community colleges rely on occupational or vocational

education programs, the potential to identify specific, immediate applications of sabbatical learning is enhanced.

Sabbatical: An Overview

Since sabbaticals were first established as a form for faculty development over a hundred years ago, faculty and administrators have identified benefits for both individuals and institutions in terms of improving teaching effectiveness, enhancing research productivity, and strengthening a faculty member's sense of commitment and loyalty to their employing institutions. Individually, faculty members with sabbatical experiences have reported feeling professionally renewed, academically strengthened, spiritually enlightened, and physically rejuvenated, thus formulating new attitudes and improving morale toward disciplinary work, students, and the institution. The argument then holds that as a result of the better feelings, instruction is enhanced, research productivity increased, and academic service improved, altering positively the image and prestige of the institutions.

As early as 1932, Cooper reported that 90% of the administrators perceived that 100% of the teachers were more valuable to the institution after sabbatical leave than before and believed that the greatest advantages of the leave were primarily professional and secondarily individual and institutional.

Many teachers, faculty, and administrator, from their own sabbatical experiences, reported that they returned to their teaching or administrative work a better person, a better teacher, or a better scholar, armed with new knowledge and energized by a new

pride in their professions (Dumser, 1991). Franse (1994) had the same feeling toward the sabbatical, from which he had come to realize that the most rewarding part of the sabbatical was the time to read, to write, and to reflect about course curriculum and life value, and he highly recommended that teacher take sabbaticals for instructional improvement.

Even though limited research has been done on sabbatical leaves, existing research has been closely related to health restoration, spiritual enlightenment, teaching improvement, research, and service, all of which would not have been accomplished without the time and freedom allowed by a sabbatical leave (Miller Kang, in press). According to Zahorski (1994), Eells and Hollis (1962), and Cooper (1932), relevant policies have addressed the sabbatical as an opportunity for self-improvement through a leave with full or partial compensation. This implies two important factors: the free time from regularly scheduled duties and the provision of full or partial salary during the break. Faculty who are on the sabbatical leave can concentrate their efforts to achieve specific goals set for their personal academic development or fulfillment in their field of study. With clearly-defined purposes, requiring a report on the leave, and obligating a return to service after the leave, the sabbatical can bind faculty and administrators for the common goals of higher education, increase loyalty and commitment to an institution, and foster the sense of faculty professional development.

Research Methods

The purpose for conducting the current study was to identify the benefits and outcomes of the sabbatical leave as practiced in community colleges. The intent was to understand the potential of the sabbatical primary as an incentive to improved teaching performance, and secondarily, as an aid to research productivity. A residual effect of the study was designed to be the identification of post-sabbatical assessment measures that can be used to determine the effectiveness and value of the sabbatical leave as a means of faculty development.

The participants of the study were senior academic affairs administrators, such as deans of instruction and vice presidents for academic affairs in community colleges throughout the United States. These administrators were assumed to be responsible for faculty development and to understand sabbatical leaves.

Using a systematic, random sampling protocol, 100 senior academic administrators were selected for the sample from the 1996 American Association for Community Colleges directory. The sample size was determined due to cost restraints and Settle and Alreck's (1985) argument that findings vary marginally in samples over this size.

Based on relevant literature and current sabbatical leave studies, a 27-item survey instrument was constructed containing three sections: general community college sabbatical information, sabbatical leave perceptions, and desired sabbatical outcomes. The instrument, although modified, had previously been used in the Miller and Kang's (in press) research, and yielded a Cronbach alpha level of .89.

The survey questionnaires were mailed to the 100 selected participants in the winter of 1997. A total of 65 questionnaires were returned, comprising a 65% return rate; however, 62 were considered valid and useable for data analysis.

Findings

Of the 62 colleges that returned the survey questionnaires, 33 (53%) reported offering sabbatical leave programs, slightly lower than the 60% identified by Anderson and Atelsek (1982). Of these 33, 14 required submission of sabbatical reports upon completion of the experience, and 19 had no post-sabbatical reporting. Application for a sabbatical varied from once every year to every 10 years, but the most common practice was for faculty to be eligible every 7 years, consistent with their 4-year college counterparts. The majority (85%) of colleges offering the sabbatical allowed faculty to take a one or two semester leave. Four institutions allowed sabbaticals to last more than two semesters and one college offered a six-week sabbatical leave program.

For the intent of the sabbatical, 19 colleges stressed the improvement of teaching as the primary purpose of sabbaticals and 12 respondents indicated that their institutions stressed research. In 18 colleges, faculty who took sabbatical leaves were reported to use the time to pursue an advanced academic degree.

General Sabbatical Responses

Using a modified 5-point scale Likert-type scale, this section identified the perceptions of academic affairs administrators concerning the benefits of the sabbatical leave. Administrators rated the strongest level of agreement with the statements of

feeling a sense of rejuvenation and renewal (x=4.34), becoming up-to-date on academic literature and knowledge base (x=4.21), feeling as though professional life has been substantially enriched (x=4.17), becoming aware of changes in academic discipline (x=4.09), and Teacher scored the highest; and Bridge (x=3.5), Scholar (x=3.45), Service (x=3.32), Posres (x=3.3), and Catchup (x=2.98) were the lowest ranking.

Sabbatical Outcomes

The majority of respondents (n=42, 68%) identified teaching improvement as a primary outcome of the sabbatical leave, and nearly as many (n=35) recognized research productivity to be a primary outcome. Under half of all respondents (n=29) perceived that faculty become more responsible citizens as a result of a sabbatical.

No significant differences were found between colleges that require submission of sabbatical reports and those which do not require submission of reports upon return from the leave in the perceptions of the sabbatical leave outcomes. However, between colleges that offer such a leave program and colleges without such an offer, a one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference in the perception of research productivity as the outcome of sabbatical. The colleges that offer sabbatical programs realized that research productivity was one of the outcomes of sabbatical leaves, while those that do not have such a program had lower opinion of sabbatical leave as an outcome of the leave program.

In addition, no significant difference was found regarding general perceptions of sabbatical leave benefits between colleges that require sabbatical reports and do not require reports upon return from the sabbatical leave. There were significant differences between colleges that offer sabbatical leaves and those which do not offer such programs

in the perceptions of sabbatical leave benefits. Colleges with sabbatical leave programs scored significantly higher than colleges without sabbatical programs in positive attitudes to research; better scholar; and caught up on research and writing schedules, all having to do with research.

Discussion

As in 4-year colleges and universities, the sabbatical leave has been practiced as a means for faculty development and institutional advancement in community colleges. Findings of the study indicated that 53% of the community colleges surveyed offered sabbatical leave programs, slightly lower than the 60% Anderson and Atelsek found in 1982. However, the practice of the sabbatical leave in community colleges is the same as most of the 4 year colleges and universities, that is, every 7 years faculty and administrators can apply for a sabbatical leave of one semester with full salary or two semester with half salary.

The intent of the sabbatical leave in community colleges was found to be related to research, teaching, service, and pursuit of advanced degrees. However, the primary purpose of the sabbatical leave program at a community college was found to be to improve teaching performance, which meets with the broad goals of community colleges (teaching excellency). In addition, there was a common belief among the respondents that teaching performance would improve as a result of the sabbatical leave, which could be evidenced by that fact that 68% respondents identified *teaching improvement* as the primary outcome for a leave program.

There is also a common, but negative belief about the academic service to the students and to the institutions as a result of the sabbatical leave. Most of the respondents did not believe sabbatical leaves would improve such services and had low opinions of the sabbaticals concerning the improvement of academic services.

As demonstrated in the study, *research* received relatively less attention from senior academic affairs administrators in community colleges. Only 19% of the respondents recognized *conducting research* as the purpose of their sabbatical leave program, and 56% of the respondents thought that *increased research productivity* was the desired outcome of the sabbatical leave. Further, among the five lowest mean scores in the perceptions of sabbatical benefits, three items were related to research: *Become caught up on research and writing schedule* (M=3.00, SD=1.11); *Develop a more positive attitude toward research* (M=3.29, SD=1.04); and *Return to their positions a better scholar and researcher* (M=3.42, SD=1.03). The results of the One-way ANOVA revealed an interesting but important finding: all the significant differences found between colleges that offer and do not offer the sabbatical leave program and between colleges that require and do not require submission of sabbatical reports upon return are related to research. In those items, colleges that offer sabbatical leaves and require submission of sabbatical reports upon return scored significantly higher than those which do not offer sabbatical leaves or require submission of sabbatical leave reports. This indicated that the offering of a sabbatical leave program and especially the requiring of submission of sabbatical reports provide a better understanding of the sabbatical leaves and that lack of understanding of the sabbatical leave leads to the belief that the sabbatical leave does not

improve research productivity. This may also evidence that improving sabbatical leave administration may also improve the sabbatical leave as an effective means for faculty development in terms of teaching, research and service in higher educational institutions.

Teaching is the first priority in community colleges and therefore, as a faculty development program, the sabbatical leave is commonly believed to be an effective means and a positive mechanism for teaching improvement. As community colleges place themselves in an increasingly competitive situation for first and second year students, this ability to market and succeed with their services will be directly tied to quality indicators such as instructional quality. Every effort must be made to construct meaningful tools for improving teaching performance. As demonstrated in the responses to this survey, the sabbatical leave should be included in the broad discussion of faculty development and teaching performance.

In order to translate the sabbatical as a developmental activity to improved teaching, specific outcome measures must be established which can provide both quantitative and qualitative data on what makes the sabbatical works. The key to scholars and practitioners, then, is the identification of outcome measures, and the justification of these criteria in terms of effectiveness.

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Table 1.

Perceptions of Community College Academic Leaders toward the Sabbatical Leave (N=62)

As a result of a sabbatical, faculty...	Mean	Std Dev
Feel a sense of rejuvenation and renewal.	4.34	.76
Become more knowledgeable of of field of study/discipline.	4.21	.64
Feel as though professional life has been substantially enriched.	4.17	.63
Become up-to-date on academic and professional literature and knowledge base.	4.17	.70
Become aware of changes in academic discipline.	4.09	.78
Return to their positions a better teacher.	3.84	.74
Become more aware of contemporary teaching methods.	3.76	.88
Return to their students eager to share experiences with them.	3.74	.69
Develop a new course (or courses) for the program's curriculum.	3.66	.85
Feel more of an obligation to help the institution.	3.58	.82
Develop a strong sense of institutional loyalty.	3.57	.75
Develop a more positive attitude toward providing institutional service.	3.53	.82
Develop a more positive attitude toward students.	3.51	.89

Table 1, continued

Perceptions of Community College Academic Leaders toward the Sabbatical Leave, continued
(N=62)

As a result of a sabbatical, faculty...	Mean	Std Dev
Become better at bridging theory and practice.	3.50	.96
Return to their positions a better scholar and researcher.	3.45	1.05
Become more active in providing services to students.	3.32	.89
Develop a more positive attitude toward research.	3.30	1.03
Become caught up on research and writing schedule.	2.98	1.11